



## The Star-Ledger

### Menendez urges Rutgers to allow drive for union

Tuesday, February 13, 2007

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U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez yesterday urged midlevel administrators at Rutgers University to unionize and sent a message to the university not to interfere with the drive.

"It seems that the power of many standing together as one is better than standing alone," Menendez said during a union-sponsored forum on campus in New Brunswick.

Menendez, a Democrat, is the latest in a string of New Jersey politicians, including Gov. Jon Corzine and Senate President Richard Codey (D-Essex), to pressure the university to allow a fair opportunity for some 3,000 midlevel administrators, professionals and supervisors to unionize. The administrators are one of the only such groups in New Jersey public higher education that does not have union representation.

Two weeks ago, Rutgers and the American Federation of Teachers signed a neutrality pact after Corzine demanded Rutgers stop sending employees e-mails extolling the virtues of nonunion employment.

Yesterday, Menendez was joined by U.S. Reps. Chris Smith (R-4th Dist.) and Frank Pallone (D-6th Dist.), state Assemblymen Joe Malone (R-Burlington) and Gary Schaer (D-Passaic) and Monsignor John J. Gilchrist of Holy Cross Church in Harrison in praising the neutrality agreement.

"I will also be watching to make sure that agreement is lived up to on all sides," Menendez said to about 75 employees gathered at the Rutgers University Labor Education Center.

Menendez also spoke about legislation he is co-sponsoring, the Employee Free Choice Act, which would provide federal protections for employees trying to unionize and is similar to a new law in New Jersey that allows workers to gain union representation by signing authorization cards instead of holding an election. He said the university should set standards for the rest of the country.

Union organizers at Rutgers say the latest drive was in part prompted by severe budget cuts at the university last year that resulted in layoffs. Workers say union representation would protect jobs and give them more control over salaries, pay raises and health benefits.

"It's really a matter of security," said Sarah O'Meara-Gonzalez, 32, of Edison, an administrative assistant at Rutgers' Department of Latino and Hispanic-Caribbean Studies. "I feel that my salary and benefits are fair, but I want to make sure that stays the same."

To form a union, organizers must collect the signatures on union authorization cards from 51 percent of the nonunion employees in each bargaining unit. The drive ends this spring.

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